

Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery – Chair's Annual Report – November 2020

What a year 2020 was!

No sooner had the Friends group completed their first Action Day of the year in February than the world was suddenly in the grips of a pandemic and had to lock down. Like so many, the Friends volunteers had to temporarily cease their volunteering activities as a group and self-isolate to protect themselves and others. As the crisis eased a little, and given our activities were held outdoors, we were able to return to Action Days in June, with extra measures in place.

Unfortunately, we have had to postpone our fundraising events and annual dinner, as well as our AGM until such time that we could all meet again indoors.

Despite the reduced number of Action Days, we still managed to achieve so much in the past 12 months, completing new projects, as well as doing general maintenance.

Projects included:

- Memorial Sculpture – thanks to our generous benefactor, a beautiful stone sculpture was commissioned and designed by the Friends group and lovingly produced by James Hilton's stonemasons. Installed in February 2020, the memorial has a simple yet meaningful inscription which says: 'PAUSE: REFLECT... Remembering those young and old, lying in graves unmarked and unvisited...CHERISH'. The cobbled approach to the memorial was skillfully and kindly installed free by local builder Paul Dixon, with funding towards materials donated by the Parish Council and Benchmark in Irlam. You can see this beautiful stone memorial to the left of the entrance gates on leaving the cemetery.
- Improvements to the storage bays behind the brick storeroom. New metal and wooden slatted retainer walls were added to the bays to enable better composting and to tidy up a once scruffy looking area. New wider paving was also installed to improve access to this area
- Internal ceiling and door repairs made, and external guttering replaced, to the brick storeroom
- Fresh bark laid to the path leading to the memorial sculpture and Friends bench – Plot 1
- Pots, entrance wall and entrance borders planted up to add some seasonal colour

I wish to thank the Friends Committee officials and members for their continued support throughout this very difficult year.

Thanks to our **Treasurer Sheila Breese** who has once again kept the books in good order and who has also continued to co-ordinate the successful and much appreciated Grave Tending Scheme. Our **Secretary Pete Higson**, has done a great job of keeping the committee in touch, enabling us all to work together productively. As well as this he has put a lot of time into planning and preparing for action days to ensure all volunteers are actively engaged on the day and have the working tools and equipment to enable them to tackle the tasks safely and effectively. Pete also liaises with WBC Bereavement Services, to ensure post action day rubbish is cleared swiftly and to highlight any works needing their attention. Our thanks to Pete for his invaluable input.

(Chair's Annual Report 2020 continued)

The commitment and enthusiasm that all our **Committee members** have shown to the ongoing support of the Friends group, and their regular attendance at meetings, means actions and projects are well thought through. With sound plans in hand we are then able to confidently welcome volunteers and engage them in tasks that make a real difference to the look of the cemetery and make them feel valued.

There is no doubt that we could not achieve what we do without the helping hands of our wonderful **Volunteers** and this year we have been fortunate enough to welcome new people to our monthly Action Days. Volunteers have eagerly turned their hands to various practical tasks such as pruning, weeding, planting, grass cutting, brushing up, gathering leaves for composting and this year to improving our storage and recycling facilities. All these make a huge difference to the ongoing look and feel of the cemetery. Our special thanks to those volunteers who also give of their time regularly between action days. One such volunteer Fred Humphreys, who keeps the grass trimmed and looking so good, was greatly missed during lockdown, but we were delighted that he was able to periodically resume his mowing in his own time and also get his regular exercise!

Support from local community members who cannot make action days, but who still want to contribute, whether financially, via material donations, or by giving their time to a project, is very much appreciated. This has proved particularly valuable this year following the break-in to our storeroom in June when people kindly donated tools and equipment as well as money to use to replace tools. Benchmark in Irlam have continued to donate much-needed waste sacks that are used during action days.

Our partnership with **WBC Bereavement Services** continues to thrive, enabling us to achieve much more for the cemetery. During the period when the Friends volunteers were in lockdown, their lads ensured that the grass was cut and that the bins were emptied regularly, keeping the cemetery from looking too neglected until the volunteers could do their magic once again at Action Days!

Our aim of '**Improving the Look and Feel of the Cemetery**' threads throughout all the activities and projects we engage in and the lovely messages of gratitude we receive from grave owners, visitors to the cemetery, local residents and WBC Bereavement Services confirm that we are doing just that.

I am personally very proud of each and everyone involved in looking after our lovely cemetery and look forward to continuing the great work we do together in 2021.

All the very best,
Mandy Eccles (Chair)